FILM *Anthony Reveaux*

Chick Strand

San Francisco

Although Chick Strand is one of the cofounders of the Canyon Cinematheque, her first Bay Area one-person show has had to wait until this January 29th. It was back in 1960 that she and filmmaker Bruce Baillie stretched a sheet, and an idea, across that legendary Canyon that became the Canyon Cinema Cooperative — the focal mirror for west coast alternative cinema. It has grown to provide generally consistent distribution and exhibition for what is basically an anarchic medium. After making a first filmic attempt within this ambience, Strand moved to Los Angeles in 1966 where she became involved with the optical printing expression furthered by Pat O'Neil, and earned an MFA from UCLA. She is now teaching film at Occidental College. Her work exemplifies a predominant characteristic of independent filmmaking in the free spanning of a cinematic spectrum which ranges from documentary to experimental sensibilities. The two extremes are seen not as mutually exclusive but as aspects of perception and thus open to personal articulation.

Angel Blue Sweet Wings (1966) is a free-flowing montage of images in celebration of life and love, employing techniques of live-action, animation, lens distortion, montage and found images. It was shown on CBS in 1973 (independent films are almost never shown on American television). *Anselmo* (1967) is perhaps her best-known film, and these jaded eyes found it so visually and spiritually delightful they demanded it be complete, as was the contrapuntal continuity of Bruce Baillie's *Castro Street* (1966) in his simultaneous use of black and white and color stocks in the finished film. As the sinuous, sensuous languor of the dancers' arms patterns the screen, pyrotechnic mandalas of fiesta fireworks begin to burn in superimposition as the film reaches a crescendo, a white biplane now transcends a lavender sky, and the tuba-carrying figure slowly marches off towards the waiting desert's horizon.

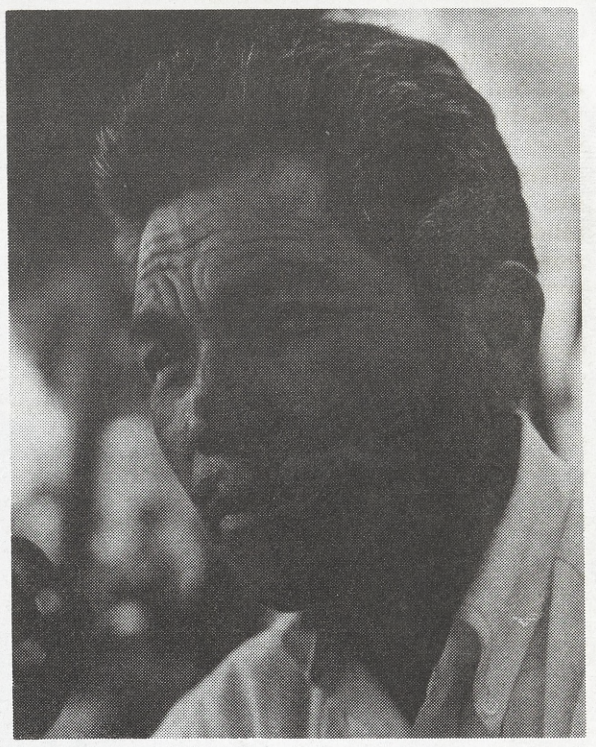
One of Strand's works is the ''ethnographic'' this kind of movie ranges between the selectively decorative formalism of the *National Geographic* specials to the celluloid rubbings of the quick-before-it-melts school of cultural anthropology. But in this one, Strand manages to tell a story which poetically spans two generations and two opposite cultures, as the Spanish Franciscan nuns ''civilize'' the Warao Indians of the Orinoco River Delta, Venezuela. The voice-over narration starts from the point of view of one of the first Sisters to ''rescue'' the Godless unfortunates in 1945, and we see the original way of life of the Indians while she sincerely dispairs that ''...they didn't *do* anything; they were *animals* before the missionaries came!'' As she congratulates the missionary efforts in civilizing them, the displacement and replacement of Warao by Western European customs is gradually and gently revealed.

Strand's camera always seems to show just the

CHICK STRAND: Florentina in a still from the film Elasticity, *to be screened at the Canyon Cinematheque, San Francisco.*

projected three times. The iconography of the music and fiesta in a small Mexican town is the raw material which is orchestrated, and shares perspectives seen in the 1957 Mexican photographs of Ann McKeever. The motif is the figure of Anselmo, a peasant walking barefoot towards the horizon, carrying a tuba in the middle of nowhere. As the tempo quickens, chromatically altered imagery of a biplane soaring to a rainbow and wild horses (as in a dream) are interjected in montage. Close-ups of dancers and swaying musicians are rhythmically choreographed in the counterpoint of camera movement and the combination of both positive and negative color film. More than a few filmmakers have dallied with the brassy, shimmering ochre and glowing, spectral verdigris of color negative film which, when printed on reversal stock, retains that process stage of its photochemistry. Usually the esthetic result is that of textural novelty, but in *Anselmo* it is structurally substantive and lyrically essentials of exposition in a fluid, subtle manner which neither overinvests the authority of master shots nor loses the intimacy of details into meaningless abstraction. One classic shot is the close-up of a young mother's tender face as she nurses; the camera slowly tilts down to the baby, who is providentially being given a plastic bottle instead of a breast. Progress.

The voice takes on the story of an old Indian woman who has seen it all come and go, through ten children and the death of her fisherman husband. In her most moving remembrance of things past, the camera holds on a view of the darkling chestnut gloom underneath a dock as the dappling amber light ripples topaz highlights from the water, imbuing the narrative with a metaphysical depth and permanency. As the woman speaks of her marriage, the camera sweeps a broad brushstroke of a swish-pan left across the green jungle, and cuts to the interior of the new wood-frame chapel. Within, the priest is



CHICK STRAND: Anselmo Aguascolientes, from Cosas de Mi Vida, *who also appears in the film* Anselmo.

marrying a young Indian couple, she with white gown and mantilla, he in suit and tie. Through the ceremony and the celebration that follows, we see that it is done, the transformation is complete, and the curtain between the two worlds has been melted away. We have been shown this with the intimacy of a first-person narrative rather than by polemic or diatribe.

Elasticity (1975) is perhaps Strand's most personal film, and she describes it as ''Impressionistic surrealism in three acts: Amnesia, Euphoria, and Ecstacy.'' If much of this film seems to rush by without connecting, it is most likely because it is too personal for anyone else. *Elasticity* is basically a dynamic visual collage of both associational montage and disparate collision of imagery in hyphenated conflict. It opens with an ancient woman wandering through a landscape with ruins. The soundtrack has voices in English, Japanese and then French as poetic subtitles appear, reading with phrases such as ''Amnesia is not knowing who one is and wanting desperately to find out.'' The counterpoint among voices, music and sound effects with poetics occurs regularly throughout the film. The majority of the visual material is found film fragments and stock footage from the thirties to the fifties, and original scenes she shot in streets and apartments. While usually employed as modules of a mosaic, often the piece of film will be optically modified as in stretch-printing to render the action in pulsing slow-motion, or a fragment will be enlarged and/or isolated as in the stunning sequence where the airborne diver from Riefenstahl's *Olympia* is totally liberated, gracefully wheeling and looping like a swallow over a churning, rust-tinted waterfall. This is a good film of its type, but where we are spectators rather than participants.

Cosas de mi Vida (1975) is an ethnographic documentary about Anselmo, the Mexican who

Continued on next page

CHICK STRAND: Still from Elasticity.

CHICK STRAND

Continued from preceeding page

received the tuba in the film of the same name, and his life and struggle to rise from indelible poverty. *Guacamole* (1975), like *Anselmo*, is a short cine-poem whose meter is in the tragic rather than the celebratory mode. It focuses on the life/death polarity of fiesta and bullfight, rendered in a deeply painterly texture, where slow-motion and blue tones give it a lyrical, if sometimes inconclusive melancholia. *Waterfall* (1967), an earlier film included in the program, is described by Strand as an ''Experimental film, optically printed, hand developed and solarized. The film incorporates footage in a flowing and gliding ode to water.''

Chick Strand will appear with a showing of all these titles on January 29, 8:30 pm, at the San Francisco Art Institute, and on February 3, 7:30 pm, at the Pacific Film Archive, University Art Museum, Berkeley. All of her films are distributed by Serious Business Company, 1609 Jaynes Street, Berkeley, Calif. 94703.□

CLASSES

The Riverside Art Center and Museum will be holding two workshops. On February 28 Joseph Mugniani, chairman of the drawing department at Otis Art Institute, will conduct a painting workshop, and on March 27 ceramist Susan Peterson will hold instruction in her field. For further information, contact the center, 3425 7th Street, Riverside, Calif. 92501.

Extension courses and workshops at the California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, will cover over thirty subjects for the beginner to the professional artist, craftsperson or teacher. To its extension program, CCAC is introducing several new subjects — Chinese and Western calligraphy, Chinese brush painting and performance art. The first of the five- and ten-week courses begin on January 26. Catalogs may be obtained from CCAC, Extension Division, Broadway at College, Oakland, Calif. 94618; 415-653-8118.

BEQUESTS TO NEWPORT

Since the Newport Harbor Art Museum announced the establishment of an Acquisition Council and expressed a strong interest in formulating a permanent collection of twentieth century art, the museum has received a number of gifts. These include *Kiss No. 2*, a 1960 oil on canvas by Emerson Woelffer, from Betty Asher; *Belle Island*, a 1963 acrylic on canvas by Donald Kaufman, from Jack and Constance Glenn; Jim Dine's oil/collage *Palette-Self Portrait,* from Mr. and Mrs. Gene Summers; and *Agitreklama,* a 1975 painting by Denis Ashbaugh, donated by the artist.

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